Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 22 Number 7 July 2025

DECCAN BIRDERS ANNUAL DINNER 2025

What happens when birders gather with great food, shared stories, and a legendary guest of honour?

You get the **Deccan Birders Annual Dinner 2025!**

Date: Sunday, 10 August 2025 **Time:** 07:00 PM – 10:00 PM **Venue:** The Plaza, Begumpet, Hyderabad

It gives us great pleasure to invite each and every one of you for this event. This year, it promises to be a night for the books!

A Felicitation Worth Flocking To

We're coming together to honour our very own **Aasheesh Pittie**, recipient of the prestigious **H.H. Bloomer Award 2025** from the Linnean Society of London, for his outstanding contribution to natural history and ornithology.

If you've ever stumbled upon *Indian BIRDS*, been mentored, inspired, or simply shared a birding walk with Aasheesh, you know this is an occasion we'll be proud to celebrate.

But that's not all...

Special Talk – One More Reason to Attend

Alongside the felicitation, we have a **surprise talk lined up** for the evening — insightful, inspiring, and perfect for our community of curious minds. (No spoilers yet — but let's just say it's one you won't want to miss!)

Dinner Under the Stars

Expect an open-air setup, sizzling grills, and conversation that flies from wagtails to whimbrels. This isn't a lecture hall night — it's an informal, fun, and flavorful get-together for all Deccan Birders.

Contribution & Payment Info

This is a **contributory event** with a fee of **₹1250 per head**. Other payment details on email.

RSVP by: 28th July 2025 (Gokul Krishna: 99453-46585; Gowthama Poludasu: 94409-10967)

Let's raise a toast to our shared love for birds, celebrate Aasheesh's incredible achievement, and enjoy an evening of community and cheer. See you there — feathers preened and binoculars optional!

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, July 20, 2025, 7.00AM: Zaheerabad. Meeting Point(s): Miyapur Metro Station, 04:30AM; BHEL Bus Stop, 04:45AM; Taj Dhaba, Muthangi, 05:00AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Sathvik Reddy Nimma (Mobile: 99858-07186)

The forest region near Zaheerabad, in close proximity to the Chincholi Wildlife Sanctuary on the Telangana-Karnataka border, is a critical habitat characterized by a rich tapestry of flora and fauna. This area, primarily a dry land ecosystem, showcases a unique blend of forest types and topographical features that support a remarkable diversity of life. The core of this forest is dominated by dry and moist deciduous forests, which transition into Acacia and Teak plantations on the fringes. The forest is also renowned for its significant populations of valuable tree species such as Red Sanders and Sandalwood, along with a variety of medicinal herbs and trees. The undulating terrain, which includes rocky outcrops and scrublands, and the Chandrampalli dam and other smaller water bodies that create a vital network of reservoirs and streams, play a crucial role in sustaining the region's wildlife.

Besides mammals like the Blackbuck, Indian Wolf, Striped Hyena and Four-horned Antelope, the area also hosts very interesting bird species like the White-bellied and Small Minivets, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, various quail species including the Rain, Jungle, Rock, and Barred Buttonquail, and the Painted Francolin.

This will be a half-day trip, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Covid protocols will be followed; please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. New Deccan Birders hats and caps will be available for purchase; please carry adequate cash.

WINGS OVER HYDERABAD: REFLECTIONS FROM THE HEART OF A HOPEFUL BIRDER

Text & Photos: Srikanth Bhamidipati

There are moments in life when your heart swells with something bigger than joy. For me, one such moment was standing ankle-deep in dry grass under a July sun, watching a Yellow-eyed Babbler flit across a bush like it had stock in caffeine. That's when it hit me – this isn't just a survey. This is a movement. A map of belonging. A hopeful hymn to Hyderabad's skies.

The Hyderabad Bird Atlas (HBA) is one of those rare citizen science projects that feels both rigorously scientific and profoundly soulful. With 180 carefully selected 1.1 sq. km. cells scattered across 11% of our city, and biannual surveys planned for three full years, it's a methodical attempt to decode the avian soul of Hyderabad.

Hyderabad Bird Atlas Season-1 closing get-together

But for those of us out in the field, waking before dawn, chasing elusive lifers, and scribbling notes while sipping lukewarm chai, it is also a labour of love.

And oh, what love it is.

If I had a personal tattoo-worthy motto, it would be: "There is always a bird."

Why? Because no matter where you are – beneath a *neem* tree or beside a noisy flyover – there's always a little winged miracle happening nearby.

There's a bird because there's a tree.
There's a bird because there's a building.
There's a bird we missed today, and a bird we'll chase tomorrow.

This truth anchors my birding life, reminding me that discovery never ends. It only evolves. World over, birders have spoken of similar sentiments. The late Phoebe Snetsinger, the first person to record over 8,000 bird species, famously said:

"Every bird is a possibility. A maybe. A promise."

Closer home, Dr Sálim Ali himself, India's most celebrated ornithologist, often recalled that it was a Yellow-throated Sparrow that first captured his heart as a ten-year-old, a spark that lit a lifelong fire. His story isn't unique. Many birders, me included, began their journeys in similar serendipitous ways – one flutter, one call, one curious moment that refused to fade.

That's why bringing children into this fold is not just desirable, it's essential.

Let's face it – today's children are more likely to identify a Naruto than a Purple Sunbird. But hand them a pair of binoculars, and something magical happens. Curiosity kicks in. Screens dim. Senses ignite. And suddenly, they're no longer observers; they're explorers. ***Young naturalists in Crocs and backpacks.***

Abhinav in action

On our last trip, 9-year-old Abhinav, a regular birder since 3 standards, spotted some birds and asked his dad with wide-eyed wonder, *"Is that its name or its superpower?"* That's when I realized we don't need to teach children how to be fascinated. We just need to give them the chance.

Then there's Rishi, another young birder who was 'doctored' into birdwatching at age 6 – although, truth be told, now it is he who drags his mother out before sunrise. His teachers say he's more focused in class. His parents say he's more grounded. And I believe him when he says, *"I feel like birds know me now."*

These aren't isolated stories. They're part of a quiet revolution.

Rishi with other members of the team during a survey

Birdwatching trains attention. It cultivates patience, observation and listening skills that digital lifestyles tend to erode. But more than that, it builds a bond with the natural world that no textbook ever could. A child who has waited ten minutes for a Tailorbird to emerge from a bush learns more about mindfulness than any app can offer.

Just imagine a generation that grows up not only knowing where the Black Kite nests, but why it matters. Imagine a Hyderabad where children debate the difference between Barbets and Bee-eaters rather than cartoons and console games.

That's the vision the Hyderabad Bird Atlas is helping to shape – a city where the guardians of tomorrow are already tuning into the wings of today.

One of the most beautiful aspects of the HBA has been the coming together of diverse birding communities – veterans with field journals older than smartphones, and beginners with more questions than field marks. It's a glorious, feather-flecked mess of checklists, debates, and laughter.

There's something inherently comic about ten people silently pointing at a distant speck and whispering, "Is that a Drongo or a disoriented Myna?" Or a group pausing a survey to break into impromptu song because someone saw a Pied Bushchat (yes, it happened). These aren't just surveys. They're social symphonies with binoculars.

And in every group, there's that one friend who always spots the lifer *after* you've packed your gear. You know who you are. And yes, we still love you.

At its core, HBA isn't just about spotting birds. It's about protecting what we still have. The data we gather helps map biodiversity, identify urban pressure points, and most importantly, make a case for conservation in a city galloping toward vertical growth. With the right momentum, this project can inform policies, designate birding hotspots, and perhaps save species from slipping into silence.

But data is sterile without stories. That's where we come in.

Each eBird entry is a stanza. Each checklist, a chorus. And together, they're composing the greatest song Hyderabad has ever sung for its birds.

A big thank you to every volunteer**,** society, and birding group who made the Hyderabad Bird Atlas possible – your dedication and love for birds have truly lifted this project. Congratulations also to all participants – from seasoned birders to first-timers, cell coordinators to data validators. Every effort, big or small, helped stitch this avian story together.

And special thanks to our young birders and mentors – you reminded us that birding is both legacy and future. Whether you were in the field, behind the scenes, or cheering from afar – **you are the wings of this movement.**

Together, we haven't just counted birds – we've created a community.

So here's my earnest call to schools, families, and communities: Bring your children. Bring your curiosity. You don't need to be an expert. Just be open. Be still. Be present.

Let's ensure that the next generation doesn't inherit bird books as nostalgia, but as living, breathing companions to their everyday lives.

Because in the end, there is always a bird.

Waiting to be seen.

Waiting to be heard.

And most importantly waiting to remind us that we, too, can soar.

Painted Francolin

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BIRDING IN SOUTH AFRICA (Part-2)
Trip Report: Madikwe Game Reserve, South Africa, April 18-21, 2024

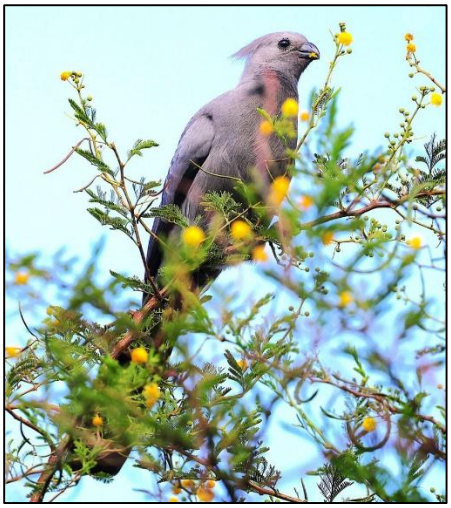
Text & Photos: Sita Susarla

Arrow-marked Babbler

The decision to visit the Madikwe Game Reserve was made for two reasons. First, it is a malaria-free zone and second, the weather is favourable throughout the year. This is a private reserve situated in the North-western province of South Africa near the border with Botswana and the vegetation is mainly Bosveld (from Afrikaans: *bos* means 'bush' and *veld* is 'field') and semi-arid Kalahari. The Madikwe game reserve is the fifth largest reserve in South Africa, and is known for its diverse mammalian population and rich bird life. The unforgettable safaris into the reserve – one in the morning and the other in the afternoon – saw us through a series of amazing adventures into the wilderness during the three-day stay.

This report is a sequel to the report about the birds of Cape Town, which appeared in the Pitta of last month (June 2025), and dwells upon the spectacular birds that we sighted during the safaris, as well as those we saw during the bird walks within the premises of Tau Lodge in which we stayed. Since the lodge is located inside the reserve, all the birds are categorised as Madikwe birds.

Tau has a water pool adjacent to its restaurant where all the animals would come twice daily for a sip of water, and the elephants entertain the onlookers by splashing the water around. The birds of course were in plenty, ranging from ducks to waders to land birds, having sand-baths, mud baths and splashes to clean their feathers.



Grey Go-away-bird

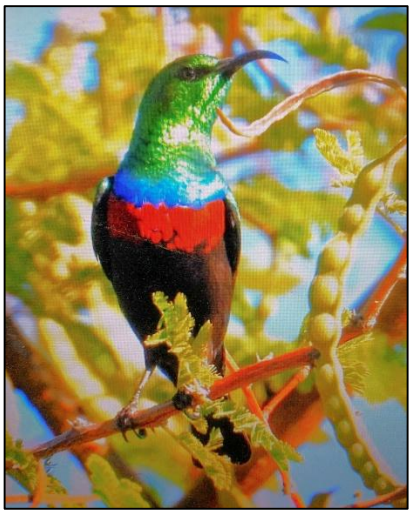
Madikwe reserve has an array of colourful birds, about 300 species of them, which are found in abundance across the sprawling reserve. The first birds we saw were a couple of Grey Go-away-birds nibbling at the yellow acacia flowers. These birds feed on fruit such as wild figs and berries, flowers, buds, leaves, termites, and snails. An interesting feature is that the Grey Go-away-bird feeds voraciously on flower petals of a variety of trees thus facilitating pollination.

Cape Glossy Starling

Blue Waxbill

As we approached them, their characteristic loud alarm call went ringing, '*kweh'*, or 'go-away'. This disturbed a flock of blue-green Cape Glossy Starlings on a nearby tree and a flock of Blue Waxbills (also called Southern Cordon Bleu) foraging on the ground. The name Waxbill refers to the bright red bill of the Common Waxbill, which resembles the red sealing wax. The Waxbills are very colourful birds, especially the Violet-eared Waxbill.

Violet-eared Waxbill



Marico Sunbird

The Marico Sunbird and White-breasted Sunbird were also in iridescent bright colours like the Cape Sunbirds.

Crimson-breasted Gonolek

Lilac-breasted Roller

Red-billed Firefinch

Other birds that wore radiant colours were the Crimson-breasted Gonolek, Lilac-breasted Roller, Purple-winged Roller, Red-billed Firefinch, Yellow-fronted Canary, Chinspot Batis, Burchell's Starling and the Pied Barbet, which has a bright red forehead and bright yellow and white eyebrows.

Pied Barbet

Chinspot Batis

Magpie Shrike

The birds that came in black and white were the Pied Crow, Magpie Shrike, Southern Pied Babbler, Southern White-crowned Shrike and the Black-backed Puffback. The male Puffback puffs up its back during display and hence the name.

Southern Pied Babbler

Black-backed Puffback

Southern White-crowned Shrike

Apart from the Pied Babbler, there was the brownish Arrow-marked Babbler.

Red-crested Korhaan

The sighting of Red-crested Korhaan (also known as the Red-crested Bustard) and the Kori Bustard was exciting, given their elusive nature. We had to park our vehicle behind the bushes and wait for them. The Red-crested Korhaan gave ample time to gaze at it and take photos, but it was not so with the Kori Bustard. It would keep running between bushes and away from where we would park. The Kori Bustard is known to be the largest flying bird, especially the male bird that stands four feet tall and weighs up to forty pounds.

Helmeted Guineafowl

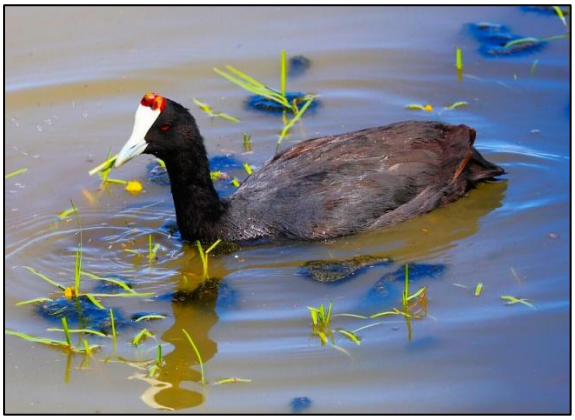
Another exciting event was a flock of gregarious Helmeted Guineafowls marching in our path during one of our safaris. There were about twenty of them parading like an army, and it was not until we drove along behind them for nearly 30 metres, that they finally allowed us to pass. The Helmeted Guineafowls are known to consume large quantities of ticks that would otherwise spread the 'Lyme Disease'.

Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill

The Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills are very common in this region and were seen during most of the safaris. The Pale Chanting Goshawk and the Black-chested Snake Eagles are endemic raptors that can be spotted on tree-tops and pylons across the reserve. Two other raptors that we spotted in flight were the Lanner Falcon and the Brown Snake Eagle.

Lanner Falcon

The waders were mostly seen at the waterhole near the restaurant. The water hole location was such that on one side was the Tau Lodge and on the other side was a panoramic view of the reserve with flat rocky land fringed by rocky mountains. The flower bearing shrubs and reeds around the water pool makes it an ideal birding ground.

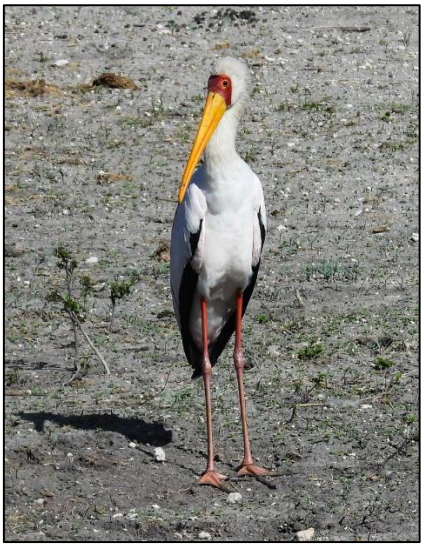


Red-knobbed Coot

African Spoonbill

There were the South African Shelducks, Red-billed Ducks, Yellow-billed Ducks, Egyptian Geese, Red-knobbed Coot, Three-banded Lapwing, Blacksmith Lapwing, Yellow-billed Stork, African Spoonbill, Grey Heron, Black-winged Stilts and Hamerkop. The presence of a pair of South African Shelducks was a surprise as they are known to inhabit brackish pans and inland waters.

Hamercop



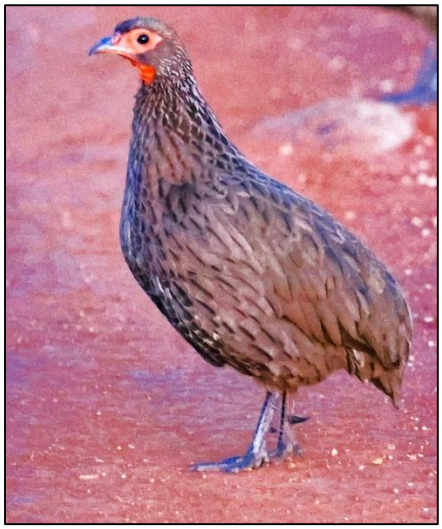
Yellow-billed Stork

The endemic Hamerkop is the only living species in the genus Scopus and the family Scopidae. Its head crest and the long black bill look like a hammer and hence the name.

Zebra with Red-billed Oxpeckers

Whenever the zebras would come to the water hole, a whole lot of Oxpeckers would come piggybacking on them. These are the Red-billed Oxpeckers that feed on ticks and other parasites that infest hoof-stock like Giraffe, Buffalo, Rhino, Zebra and antelopes like Impala and Kudu.

Natal Spurfowl



Swainson's Spurfowl

The calls of the Natal Spurfowl, the Swainson's Spurfowl and the Crested Francolins reverberated throughout the Tau Lodge and it was easy taking their snapshots during the bird walks. The Swainson's Spurfowls, spotted on the rocky side of the waterpoint, look like small round rocks especially when they bend to the ground, and when they run it is like the rocks are rolling on the ground. We spotted them while scanning the ground with the binoculars as they were completely camouflaged by the terrain.

There was also a Speckled Pigeon among them and a few Blacksmith Lapwings.

White-browed Sparrow-weaver

With around sixty odd new species of birds and snapshots of a variety of scenic views of the Game Reserve the trip was well worth the time spent.

The full list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Egyptian Goose	*Alopochen aegyptiaca*	21	Three-banded Plover	*Charadrius tricollaris*
2	South African Shelduck	*Tadorna cana*	22	Blacksmith Lapwing	*Vanellus armatus*
3	Spur-winged Goose	*Plectropterus gambensis*	23	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*
4	Yellow-billed Duck	*Anas undulata*	24	Yellow-billed Stork	*Mycteria ibis*
5	Red-billed Duck	*Anas erythrorhyncha*	25	African Spoonbill	*Platalea alba*
6	Helmeted Guineafowl	*Numida meleagris*	26	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
7	Crested Francolin	*Ortygornis sephaena*	27	Hamerkop	*Scopus umbretta*
8	Natal Spurfowl (aka Natal Francolin)	*Pternistis natalensis*	28	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*
9	Swainson's Spurfowl (aka Swainson's Francolin)	*Pternistis swainsonii*	29	Black-chested Snake Eagle	*Circaetus pectoralis*
10	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	30	Brown Snake Eagle	*Circaetus cinereus*
11	Speckled Pigeon (aka African Rock Pigeon)	*Columba guinea*	31	Pale Chanting Goshawk	*Melierax canorus*
12	Ring-necked Dove (aka Half-collared Dove)	*Streptopelia capicola*	32	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	*Tockus leucomelas*
13	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	33	Lilac-breasted Roller	*Coracias caudatus*
14	Namaqua Dove	*Oena capensis*	34	Purple-winged Roller	*Coracias temminckii*
15	Kori Bustard	*Ardeotis kori*	35	Acacia Pied Barbet	*Tricholaema leucomelas*
16	Red-crested Bustard (aka Red-crested Korhaan)	*Lophotis ruficrista*	36	Lanner Falcon	*Falco biarmicus*
17	Grey Go-away-bird	*Corythaixoides concolor*	37	Chinspot Batis	*Batis molitor*
18	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	38	Black-backed Puffback	*Dryoscopus cubla*
19	Red-Knobbed Coot	*Fulica cristata*	39	Crimson-breasted Gonolek (Shrike)	*Laniarius atrococcineus*
20	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	40	Fork-tailed Drongo	*Dicrurus adsimilis*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
41	Magpie Shrike	*Lanius melanoleucus*	56	Cape Glossy Starling	*Lamprotornis nitens*
42	Southern White-crowned Shrike	*Eurocephalus anguitimens*	57	Marico Flycatcher	*Bradornis mariquensis*
43	Pied Crow	*Corvus albus*	58	Mocking Cliff Chat	*Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris*
44	Ashy Tit	*Melaniparus cinerascens*	59	Marico Sunbird	*Cinnyris mariquensis*
45	Sabota Lark	*Calendulauda sabota*	60	White-bellied Sunbird	*Cinnyris talatala*
46	Monotonous Lark	*Mirafra passerina*	61	White-browed Sparrow-weaver	*Plocepasser mahali*
47	Long-billed Crombec (aka Cape Crombec)	*Sylvietta rufescens*	62	Village Weaver	*Ploceus cucullatus*
48	Green-backed Camaroptera (aka Bleating Camaroptera)	*Camaroptera brachyura*	63	Black-faced Waxbill	*Brunhilda erythronotos*
49	Black-chested Prinia	*Prinia flavicans*	64	Violet-eared Waxbill (aka Common Grenadier)	*Granatina granatina*
50	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	65	Southern Cordon Bleu (aka Blue Waxbill)	*Uraeginthus angolensis*
51	Chestnut-vented Warbler	*Curruca subcoerulea*	66	Red-billed Firefinch (aka Senegal Firefinch)	*Lagonosticta senegala*
52	Arrow-marked Babbler	*Turdoides jardineii*	67	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
53	Southern Pied Babbler	*Turdoides bicolor*	68	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	*Passer diffusus*
54	Red-billed Oxpecker	*Buphagus erythrorynchus*	69	Yellow-fronted Canary	*Serinus mozambicus*
55	Burchell's Starling	*Lamprotornis australis*			

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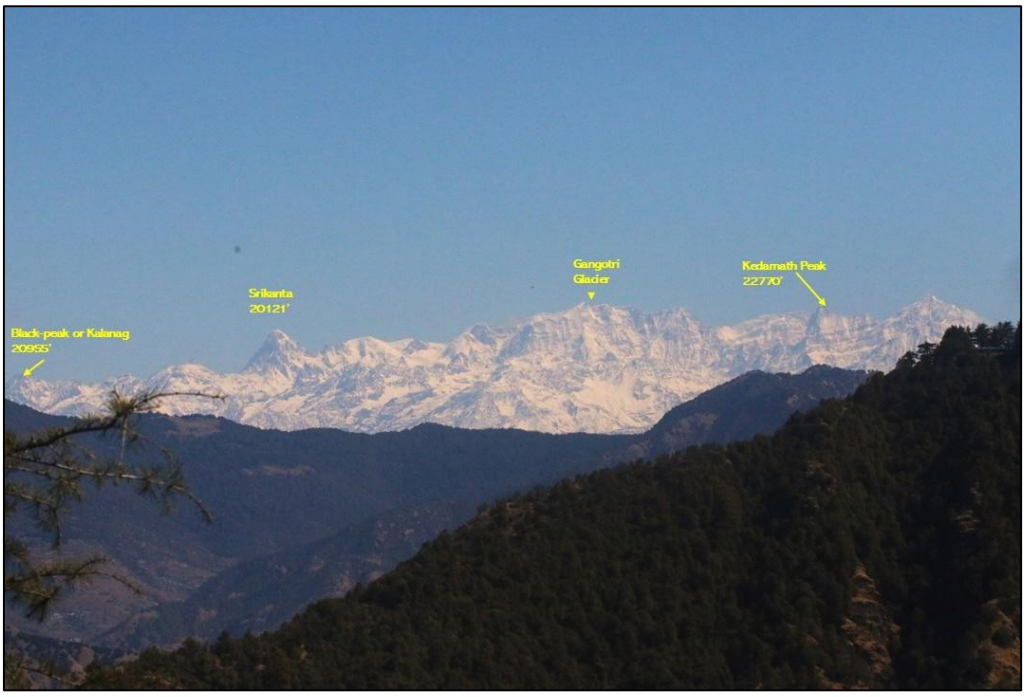
DEHRADUN GEO-TOURISM
Trip Report: Dehradun, Rishikesh & Mussoorie, March 10-20, 2025

Text & Photos: Dr G Samuel Sukumar



A view of the Himalayas from Gun Hill, Mussoorie

'Himalayas' – the snow-covered, tallest, folded mountain chain on earth – was formed by the collision of the Indian plate with the Eurasian plate during continental drift. It was once part of the Pangea or supercontinent which split into Gondwanaland and other land masses starting from 335 million years carboniferous to about 200 million years (Triassic to Jurassic period). The Himalayas are divided into three folded mountain ranges viz. 1. Great Himalayas 2. Lesser Himalayas 3. The Shivalik Hills.

The Great Himalayas constitute the Himadri, Everest being part of the high ranges above 6000 metres. The Lesser Himalayas are south of the Great Himalayas, and the Shivaliks are the foothills ranging from 900m to 1100m in elevation. They are a store house of several fossil records indicating their age. Geologists have recorded and studied the various fossils found from Cambrian (trilobites – the first crawling life on Earth) to Triassic to Jurassic species.

The Doon valley in the Shivalik hills is an unusually long and wide valley in the lesser Himalayas located in the Indian states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. Dehradun is the capital city of the State of Uttarakhand, and located within this valley. The town was established when Ram Rai, the son of the seventh Sikh guru Har Rai, built a gurudwara in the 17th century.

Dehra Ram gurudwara

Ram Rai, who went to the durbar of Aurangzeb as an emissary, found favour of Aurangzeb who granted him a *jagir*, and that town was later called as Dehradun, after Dehra referring to Ram Rai's shrine. During the British colonial rule, it was called as Dehra and later changed to Dehradun. Considered as a safe city, it has several government organisations like the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) for civil services training in public administration in Mussoorie, The Indian Military Academy (IMA), Forest Research Institute (FRI), Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, Oil and Natural Gas Company (ONGC), The headquarters of the Survey General, Survey of India (SOI) etc.

From 10th March 2025 to 20th March 2025, as part of Geo-tourism, we, a team of retired Directors of the Geological Survey of India dealing with our geo-heritage – viz. Vundavalli Ravi Kumar, Dr BM Faruque, Dr G Samuel Sukumar, PV Sesha Rao, V Hanumanth Rao, geophysicist JV Rama Rao along with Sri Ajit Kumar Addl Director General (Rtd) – visited many places around Dehradun to suggest some of these areas as socio-religious and cultural sites along with their importance as signature sites of Himalayan orogeny. We were joined by Officers of Geological Survey of India from Uttarakhand, the local Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Oil and Natural Gas Company (ONGC), and some Retired Professors of Universities who have worked extensively in these areas.

Maldevta, about 20 to 25 km from Dehradun, is on the seasonal-flowing Song River. The area has rock formations indicating the snowball effect, evidence of glaciation of unsorted crushed rock moved by a glacier, involving a period of 60 million years of glaciation. The place is visited by students of Geology from various universities – in fact we actually met students of IIT Roorkee there.

Crested Kingfisher

Red-wattled Lapwing

Blue Rock Thrush male

Blue Rock Thrush female

The birds that we saw in this area were Crested Kingfisher, Red-wattled Lapwing, Pond Heron and Blue Rock Thrush.

Plum-headed Parakeet male

Plum-headed Parakeet female

Scarlet Minivet female

Himalayan Bulbul

Plum-headed Parakeet, Red-vented Bulbul, Himalayan Bulbul, Scarlet Minivet, Black Bulbul, Common Myna and Plain Prinia were also seen. Most of these birds were busy either sucking nectar or eating the flowers of the red silk cotton tree.

Black Bulbul

The Black Bulbul seems to command supremacy over other species. Here I met some bird watchers busily photographing birds on red silk cotton trees.

Mohund area is a part of the Rajaji National Park with a gate of entry into the forested area, on the banks of River Khajnawar Rao. Rock formations here indicate a series of folds in the form of anticlines and synclines in the mudstone sequence, and alluvial deposits. We get to see on the western bank of the river the Middle Shivalik Rocks that have tectonically crept over the late Pleistocene-Holocene alluvial deposits – this contact is geologically referred to as the Mohund Thrust or the Himalayan Frontal Thrust (HFT).

Being part of the Rajaji Tiger Reserve, the forest gate guards allow you to enter with caution of movements of elephants and leopards. The river during this part of the year has only small streams flowing.

Indian Elephant

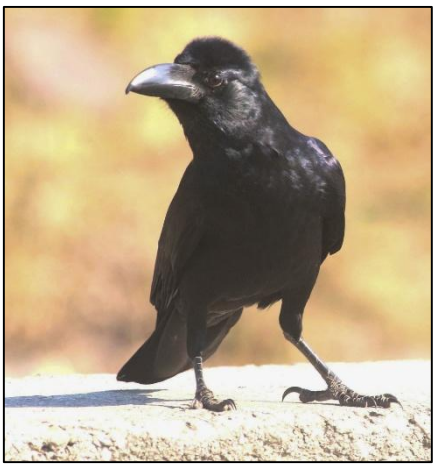
Indian Roller

Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker

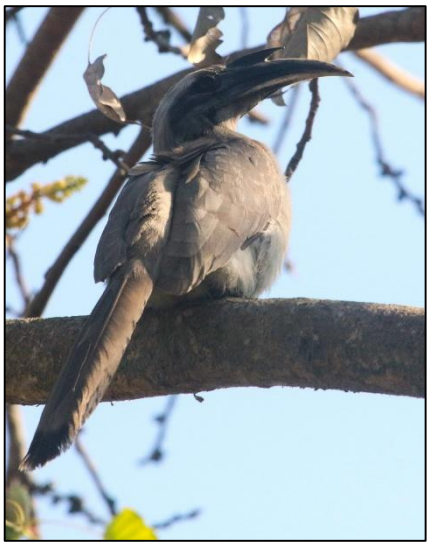
White Wagtail

Purple Sunbird male

Apart from the large mammals like elephants and leopards, bird life includes the Indian Roller, Long-tailed Shrike, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Rufous Treepie, various Sunbirds, Collared Dove, Indian Peafowl, Green Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover, White Wagtail, Indian Jungle and House Crows, Common Myna, Blue Rock Thrush, Indian Grey Hornbill, Pied Bushchat, and the highlight, Egyptian Vultures.



Indian Jungle Crow



Indian Grey Hornbill

Egyptian Vulture

We were informed by some visitors that they saw a pair of Leopards in the riverbed. As it was getting dark, we left the area so as to not disturb the cats, as it was their time to hunt for their dinner.

Tapkeshwar Temple, also known as **Tapkeshwar Mahadev Temple,** is a on the bank of the Tons River. Built on top of a natural cave, the temple's main Shivalinga, is the stalagmite formed from calcium carbonate-rich water which falls as drops and hence its name. The pilgrims bathe in the sulphur-rich waters of the river. Sunbirds, Himalayan Bulbul, Indian Cabbage White butterfly etc were seen here.

Indian Cabbage White

Sahastradhara

Cinereous Tit

Sahastradhara, meaning 'thousand-fold spring', is one of the most popular tourist destinations, located 11 km from Dehradun. Known for its sulphur-rich springs, it is situated on the banks of Baldi River, a tributary of Song River.

White-capped Redstart

Bird life seen here were the Common Kingfisher, Himalayan Bulbul, Cinereous Tit, White-capped Redstart, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Grey Wagtail, Purple Sunbird etc.

Common Kingfisher

Plumbeous Water Redstart male

Plumbeous Water Redstart female

We also saw butterflies like the Chocolate Pansy, Five Rings, Common Palm Fly and Indian Cabbage White.

Five Rings

A closer look at the old sediment overlain above the younger sediment

Common Palmfly

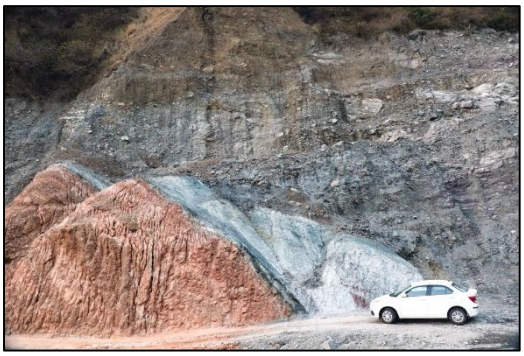
A typical scene at Katapathar

Chocolate Pansy

A closer view of the cracked cobbles at Katapathar

Katapathar, as the name suggests, consists of fragmented or cracked cobbles which when nudged shatters into small pieces, indicative of the effect of the Main Boundary Thrust (MBT) which is seen in this area. We saw the Plain Prinia, Cinereous Tits and Himalayan Bulbul here.

Rishikesh is a pilgrim town situated on the right bank of the River Ganges. Famous for ashrams that are into meditation and considered as the yoga capital of the world, it is also famous for river rafting, bungee jumping and water sports. We stayed very close to the Old Lakshman Jhoola (the new one is now under construction).



Effect of the Main Boundary Thrust seen in the overlaying of old sediment (bluish) over younger sediment (buff)

Kalij Pheasant

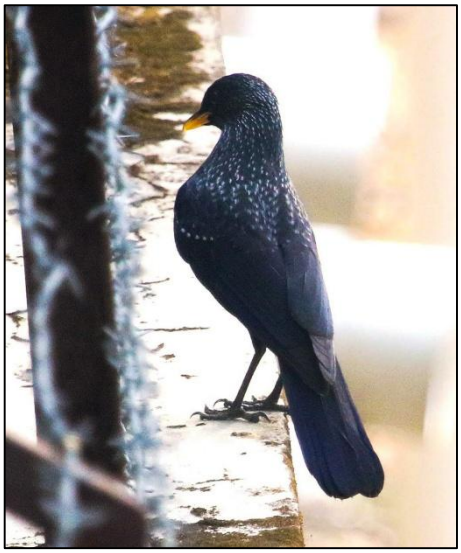
The hotel where we stayed is built on the slope of the now stabilised quaternary terrace of the River Ganges. The backyard of the hotel has a thick forest on the steep slope.

Red Junglefowl

White-crested Laughingthrush

The balconies gave us good views of birds like Red Junglefowl, Kalij Pheasants, White-crested Laughingthrush and Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike.

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike



Blue Whistling Thrush

Indian Peafowl male with full train

Peahen

Blue Whistling Thrush, Indian Peafowl including the peacocks with long tail feathers, and a Jungle Owlet. Rhesus monkeys, House Sparrows, feral Rock Pigeons, Sunbirds, Greater Flameback woodpecker were also seen. In fact, every morning you are awakened by the shrill crowing of the Junglefowl!

Greater Flameback

Near the Rishikesh town is the Chilla Barrage which diverts the Ganges into a canal system. We could see Cormorants and Medium Egret preening, Asian Brown Flycatcher, dancing Peacocks, White-capped Redstart, grazing Spotted Deer and busy Barn Swallows along the canal's edge.

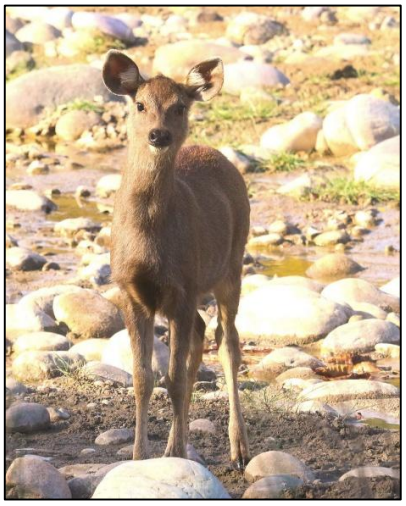
Barn Swallow

Indian Peafowl male displaying

Spotted Deer

The forested hilly slopes and *ghat* roads gave us a glimpse of Indian Hog Deer, Kalij Pheasant. You cannot ignore the presence of the Indian Grey Hornbill and Rufous Treepie on the tall trees while the Jungle and House Crows scavenge in the garbage bins near eateries.

The team at the Rajaji National Park Safari



Sambhar deer

Rajaji National Park and Tiger Reserve is named after Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, the first and last Indian Governor-General of independent India. Covering an area of 820 sq. km it was formed in 1983 by the merger of three sanctuaries – Chilla, Motichur and Rajaji. We entered through the Chilla gate in two Maruti Gypsy safari vehicles. A 36 km safari ride was bumpy with no sighting of the elusive leopard and tiger. We could see Indian Elephants, Spotted Deer, Sambhar Deer, Wild Boar, Indian Jungle Crow, Red Junglefowl and Kalij Pheasant.

Wild Boar

Siberian Stonechat

Grey Bushchat female

Lineated Barbet

Black Stork immature

Also seen were the Egyptian Vulture, Siberian Stonechat, Grey Bushchat, Lineated Barbet, Black Stork, Indian Peafowl and Rose-ringed Parakeet.

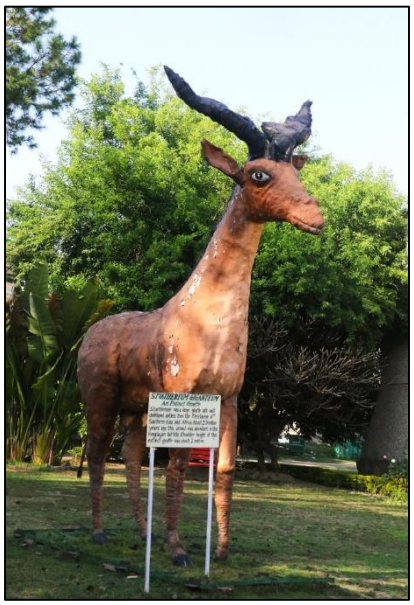
Team members at the Forest Research Institute

The **Forest Research Institute (FRI)** has an excellent display of models of different types of forest, their protection from pests and forest products. We had a conducted tour by a designated person who showed us around the various galleries. The long brick arched corridors are mesmerising.

Beautiful brick corridors at the Forest Research Institute

The **Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology** has a well displayed geological museum with fossils of Turtles and Hippopotamus, and some rocks of the Himalayas.

The team at Wadia Museum



Life-size model of the extinct Giraffe *Sivatherium giganteum*

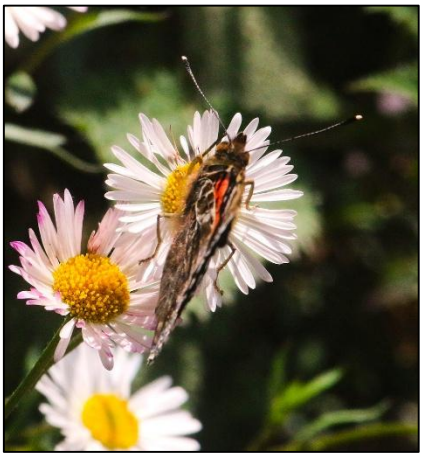
Also on display are life-size models of the extinct Giraffe *Sivatherium giganteum*, which was a large extinct giraffe with well-developed antlers in the males (while females had no antlers). It lived during the Pleistocene (2.5 million years ago) from Africa to southern Asia, and was abundant in the Himalayan foothills, measuring 7 feet (more than 2 m) at the shoulder. Inside the museum, there is also another model which is one-tenth its natural size, along with fossilised skull etc.

The museum model, one-tenth the size

Mussoorie is a hill station about 35 km from Dehradun at an elevation of 6,578 ft. When there is no cloud cover, it gives you a spectacular view of the Great Himalayas. It is also called the Queen of the Hills and is a popular tourist destination during summers. The highest point is the Lal Tibba, followed by the Gun Hill (6,640 ft). Butterflies like the Common Sailor, Indian Tortoiseshell, and some honeybees were seen gathering nectar from flowers on the slopes.

Indian Honeybee

Common Sailor



Indian Tortoiseshell

Climate was favourable during our visit, so we could see the great Himalayan ranges without cloud cover. The Library Chowk is a crossroad point where one can see the Hotel Savoy, mention of which is there in one of Agatha Christie's novels.

Rhesus Macaque

The area is quite busy with tourists along the Mall Road – and also the Indian Langur and Rhesus Macaques. Some Langurs with babies were comfortably sitting on the arms and near the feet of the statue of Mahatma Gandhi.

Indian Langurs making themselves comfortable at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi

Using the trigonometric surveys, from Lal Tibba, the height of the mountain was measured which later was named Mount Everest. Presently, it is measured using satellites as 8,848.86 meters (29,031.7 feet) above sea level. It is still growing at 5 mm/year.

We stayed about 6 km away at the foothills of Mussoorie, in a hotel which had a roof top restaurant, visited by rhesus monkeys, especially one with an amputated wrist. Tall trees nearby were occupied by the Great and Blue-throated Barbets. Junglefowl calls were heard in the early morning. Himalayan and Red-vented Bulbuls and Common Mynas foraged around.

Blue-throated Barbet

Great Barbet

Streaked Laughingthrush

Other birds seen were Barn Swallows, House Sparrows, Rock Pigeons, Streaked Laughingthrush and Black Kites.

House Sparrow female

Black Kite

Phosphorite

The area also had an old phosphorite mine near Suakholi which is east of Bathagad Toll Gate. Phosphorite is P_2O_5, a fertilizer mineral mined and processed to be used as a fertilizer. In the field it is identified by the odour of a freshly broken sample which gives a smell of rotten eggs H_2S. This area is also a site to search for Tal Trilobites (Cambrian).

It was a great trip encompassing two major areas of interest for me – geology and birding – and gave me a lot of memories to keep for the long-term.

The full list of birds and other taxa seen during the trip:

BIRDS					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Asian Brown Flycatcher	*Muscicapa latirostris*	33	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
2	Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	*Hemipus picatus*	34	Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striata*
3	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	35	Red Junglefowl	*Gallus gallus*
4	Black Bulbul	*Hypsipetes leucocephalus*	36	Kalij Pheasant	*Lophura leucomelanos*
5	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	37	Lineated Barbet	*Megalaima lineata*
6	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	38	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*
7	Black Stork	*Ciconia nigra*	39	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*
8	Blue Rock Thrush	*Monticola solitarius*	40	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
9	Blue-throated Barbet	*Psilopogon asiaticus*	41	Medium Egret	*Ardea intermedia*
10	Blue Whistling Thrush	*Myophonus caeruleus*	42	Oriental White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
11	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	*Yungipicus nanus*	43	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
12	Cinereous Tit	*Parus cinereus*	44	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*
13	Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	45	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
14	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	46	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*
15	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	47	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*
16	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	48	Plumbeous Water Redstart	*Rhyacornis fuliginosa*
17	Coppersmith Barbet	*Megalaima haemacephala*	49	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
18	Crested Kingfisher	*Megaceryle lugubris*	50	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
19	Egyptian Vulture	*Neophron percnopterus*	51	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
20	Rock Pigeon (feral)	*Columba livia*	52	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*
21	Jungle Owlet	*Glaucidium radiatum*	53	River Lapwing	*Vanellus duvaucelii*
22	Great Barbet	*Megalaima virens*	54	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
23	Greater Flameback	*Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus*	55	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
24	Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*	56	Scarlet Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*
25	Grey Bushchat	*Saxicola ferreus*	57	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*
26	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	58	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*
27	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*	59	Streaked Laughingthrush	*Trochalopteron lineatum*
28	Himalayan Bulbul	*Pycnonotus leucogenys*	60	Blue Whistling Thrush	*Myophonus caeruleus*
29	Himalayan Griffon	*Gyps himalayensis*	61	White-capped Redstart	*Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*
30	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	62	White-crested Laughingthrush	*Garrulax leucolophus*
31	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	63	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
32	Indian Jungle Crow	*Corvus culminatus*	64	White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*

MAMMALS			BUTTERFLIES & BEES		
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Indian Hog Deer	*Axis porcinus*	1	Indian Cabbage White	*Pieris canidia*
2	Spotted Deer (Chital)	*Axis axis*	2	Chocolate Pansy	*Junonia iphita*
3	Sambhar Deer	*Rusa unicolor*	3	Five Rings	*Ypthima baldus*
4	Indian Elephant	*Elephas maximus indicus*	4	Common Palm Fly	*Elymnias hypermnestra*
5	Indian Langur	*Semnopithecus entellus*	5	Common Sailor	*Neptis hylas*
6	Rhesus Macaque	*Macaca mulatta*	6	Indian Tortoiseshell	*Nymphalis*
7	Wild Boar	*Sus scrofa*	7	Indian Honeybee	*Apis cerana indica*

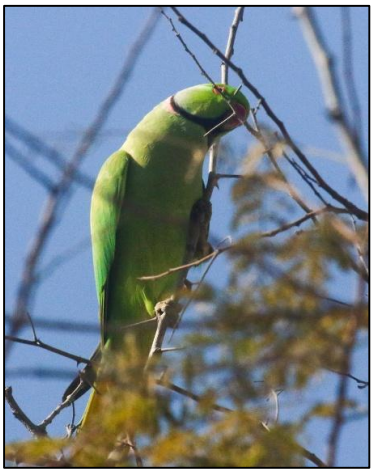
Some other photographs taken during the trip:

Long-tailed Shrike

Indian Treepie

White-capped Redstart

White-throated Kingfisher



Rose-ringed Parakeet

Common Myna

River Lapwing

Jungle Babbler

Purple Sunbird male

Red-vented Bulbul

Streaked Laughingthrush

Cinereous Tit

Himalayan Bulbul

Grey Wagtail

Indian White-eye

Himalayan Griffon

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Nilgiri Pipit (*Anthus nilghiriensis*)

Nilgiri Pipit (Munnar, Kerala, October 1, 2017)

Order:	Passeriformes
Family:	Motacillidae
Genus:	*Anthus*
Species:	*A. nilghiriensis*
Size:	17 cm
IUCN Status:	Vulnerable

Description & distribution: The Nilgiri Pipit is a distinctive species of pipit that is endemic to the high altitude hills in the Nilgiris and the Anamalais in southern India. It is richer brown in colour than the rest of the pipits seen in the region, with dark lores and a buff supercilium and throat, and no malar stripe. Bill is dark, and the crown, mantle and upperparts show heavy dark streaking. Breast, sides of neck and flanks are a brighter buff. It is different from other pipits in that the fine streaking on the breast also continues along the flanks. Outer tail feathers are also buff, and there is no white anywhere in the plumage. Tail feathers are pointed, with the second outer feather showing a tapering triangle along the shaft, and the third outer feather ending in a small triangle at the tip.

Habitat & behaviour: The Nilgiri Pipit is seen mostly in singles or in pairs in its preferred habitat, which is primarily the short montane grasslands, marshy areas and small streams, above 1000m in the Ponmudi Hills, and above 1500m in the Nilgiris, Palani and High Ranges. Like most pipits, they tend to forage silently, looking for their primary diet items like grass seeds and small insects, with the proportion of invertebrates increasing during breeding season. When flushed, they usually fly into a low bush or tree, behaviour possibly remnant from its being closely related to the tree pipits, from whom it diverged in the Pliocene era (5.33 to 2.56 million years ago).

Nesting: The Nilgiri Pipit breeds mainly between April and July. Its nest is a cup made of grass, and built within short grass. The usual clutch consists of 2-3 grey-brown speckled eggs.

Local name: The Nilgiri Pipit is known as *'Nelvayil nettaikaali'* in Tamil and *'Paranirangan'* or *'Pullolian'* in Malayalam, the latter meaning 'someone who hides in grass'.

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For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **Website:** www.deccanbirders.in. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/deccanbirders. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*